



Lesson Plan

Information Diet: A Case Study on the Power of Information

Objective(s):

- Explore the impact information has on individuals
- Analyze the power information had on both Medgar Evers and Byron de la Beckwith
- Create a public service announcement poster on the importance information has in our lives

Grade Level: High School (9-12)

Subject: History/Social Studies

Standards:

Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards for Social Studies	MS.8.1 - Analyze the significant figures, groups, and events of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.	USH 11.3 - Explain the contributions of individuals and groups to the modern Civil Rights Movement.	USG.6.7 - Investigate the controversies that have resulted over changing Interpretations of civil rights.
College, Career, and Civic Life: C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards	D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.		D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.
Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies	RH.11-12.7 - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.		WHST.11-12.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

Introductory Narratives

Medgar Evers

Medgar Wiley Evers was born on July 2, 1925, in the small town of Decatur, Mississippi. Throughout his youth, Evers's parents emphasized education, religion, and hard work. Medgar went on to attend all-Black schools in Newton County, schools with limited resources and supplies for students. During his childhood and teen years, Medgar occasionally saw the violence Black people throughout the state experienced. He witnessed the violent capture of Willie Tingle, his father's friend, who was shot and hanged.

In 1942, Medgar took a brave step as he volunteered to join the United States Army. While in the military, he was relegated to a segregated support unit as Black soldiers were seen as "inferior" in combat. While fighting in the war, Evers was frustrated by the treatment Black service members received, which worsened when he fought for the rights of others he did not have back in America. After returning home, Medgar and Charles led a group of Black veterans in an attempt to register to vote. Although they ultimately failed, it started Medgar's path of activism.

Evers was particularly moved to activism by the 1955 murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till. After Till's brutal murder, Medgar urged the NAACP's national leadership to get involved by investigating the case. Under Evers' leadership, the organization conducted a secret investigation to look for Black witnesses willing to come forward and speak. Medgar's work investigating Till's murder made him a target for white supremacists. Evers continued his work in Mississippi, forming local chapters of the NAACP, organizing protests, and leading voter registration drives. He was also instrumental in James Meredith finally desegregating the University of Mississippi. He was also a vocal supporter of Clyde Kennard, a Black man who unsuccessfully attempted to desegregate the University of Southern Mississippi.

Evers faced several instances of attempted violence and intimidation by white supremacists, including death threats and the firebombing of his home. The violence came to a head on June 12, 1963. At roughly 12:20 AM, Medgar returned home from a church meeting and exited the car with his arms filled with "Jim Crow Must Go" T-shirts. As he walked towards the kitchen door, he was shot and killed by a White supremacist hiding in the woods. After Medgar Evers's assassination, his work continued and could be seen in landmark events like the 1963 Freedom Vote, 1964's Freedom Summer, and the civil rights work continued by Myrlie Evers. Medgar Evers's work has stood the test of time as he is one of the pioneers of Mississippi's Civil Rights Movement.

During his life, Evers took information from his various surroundings. He witnessed segregation and violence early in life, which helped influence him as much as his parents did. His time in the military informed him of the depth of the inadequacies Black people faced in America. His time as an activist helped inform him of the struggles people went through in Mississippi and beyond. Medgar also read broadly. Whether newspapers, books, magazines, or pamphlets, Medgar absorbed information from sources worldwide. For example, he admired the dedication and passion of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, and he named his first son after the movement's leader, Jomo Kenyatta. These sources helped shape Evers into the dedicated, impactful activist he became.

Byron de la Beckwith

Byron de la Beckwith was born in Colusa, California, on November 9, 1920. Beckwith's father died when he was just five years old, and he and his mother settled in Greenwood, Mississippi, where her family was from. He was raised in a plantation home his grandfather owned after the Civil War. During Beckwith's time at the house, he was surrounded by, and waited on, by Black domestic workers. This established a belief that Black people were beneath their white counterparts.

Beckwith became enamored with several infamous racist politicians as a child. While living in Greenwood, his family's next-door neighbors frequently hosted Governor James K. Vardaman, whom Beckwith developed an interest and appreciation for. This then evolved into an admiration for Governor and U.S. Senator Theodore G. Bilbo. Beckwith was also a distant cousin of U.S. Senator James Eastland. His family added to his beliefs by reinforcing segregationist beliefs. When he attended school on the Kellogg Sanitarium grounds, he informed his mother he had three Black classmates. He was immediately removed from the class.

After finishing high school and leaving college, Beckwith joined the Marines and saw extensive service in World War II's Pacific Theater when the military was still segregated. On his return home after the war, people noticed a change in Beckwith's demeanor towards race relations. This was exacerbated in 1954 following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. After the court's decision, Beckwith became a more virulent racist and segregationist. This included joining the Citizen's Council, an organization formulated after the *Brown* decision to combat desegregation. His outrage was increased after hearing segregationist Mississippi circuit court judge Tom P. Brady speak; friends stated Beckwith would have rage-fueled outbursts at the mention of Black people following the speech.

Beckwith's first act in an attempt to oppose desegregation was at a local bus station. The station had desegregated its waiting rooms, and it bothered Beckwith, so he desegregated the waiting rooms himself and would stand guard to ensure they remained that way. His beliefs and actions started to gain notoriety around the state. When Beckwith learned of James Meredith's attempt to desegregate the University of Mississippi, he loaded his truck full of firearms and headed towards the developing opposition and eventual riots. The police were expecting him, however, and he was turned around and sent home.

Medgar Evers's work with James Meredith put him on Beckwith's radar as early as 1961. His wife recalls him talking negatively of Evers, going as far as to say, "he has to go." On June 12, 1963, he used a high-powered sniper rifle to assassinate Medgar Evers outside of his home. Beckwith stood trial twice for the Evers murder, but a hung jury resulted in him walking free both times. Despite being free, the court revealed more of Beckwith's racist rhetoric, with witnesses recalling him saying, "For the next 15 years, we here in Mississippi are going to have to do a lot of shooting to protect our wives and our children from bad Negroes and sorry white folks and federal interference." Beckwith was jailed in 1973 after attempting to murder the director of a New Orleans-based Anti-Defamation League.

In 1994, Beckwith faced a third trial for the Evers assassination. For the first time, the jury was integrated, unlike the all-white juries he faced in the 1960s. New evidence had emerged, including Beckwith's frequent bragging that he had murdered Evers. Finally, on February 5, 1994, he was found guilty of the murder of Medgar Evers. Beckwith lost his appeal in 1997 and died in 2001 from natural causes.

Byron de la Beckwith's segregationist, racist beliefs were established early, as Confederate ideals were ingrained in him by his family and surroundings. His grandmother and aunt were members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, a group largely responsible for establishing Confederate monuments throughout the country. His connection to and admiration for racist Mississippi politicians further exacerbated those beliefs. Finally, the power of Tom P. Brady's speech incensed Beckwith to a murderous degree, leading to the assassination of Medgar Evers.

Information Journal

Many people use a food journal to keep up with their diet. It allows them to see where their calories, sugar, protein, and more come from. The same practice can be used for information we take in. Analyzing where and from whom information comes can help us

understand it more thoroughly: Is it trustworthy? Is it biased? Is it even factual? All these questions and more can help us understand whether the information we're receiving is entirely legitimate.

We learned about the information that Medgar Evers and Byron de la Beckwith received and how it influenced their beliefs, actions, and lives. This week, you're going to do the same for yourself. Each day, you will log some of the information you receive, where it's from, and how it influences you. We will also have a daily journal prompt to explore our information journal and better understand how what we hear and see affects us.

Definitions:

- **Activism** - to promote or make a difference in laws and policies.
- **Assassinate** - murder for political reasons.
- **Catalyze** - to cause, begin, or accelerate.
- **Desegregate** - to end the separation of races.
- **Enlist** - to join.
- **Infamous** - well known for some bad deed or quality
- **Inferior** - being less than others, not as good.
- **Segregate** - to separate by race.
- **Supremacist** - to believe someone is better than others.
- **Virulent** - bitterly hostile

Sources:

- <https://www.nps.gov/memy/index.htm>
- <https://mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/medgar-evers-and-the-origin-of-the-civil-rights-movement-in-mississippi>
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-impact-emmett-tills-murder/>
- <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/civil-rights-leaders/medgar-evers>
- <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/medgar-evers>
- <https://www.mec.cuny.edu/history/life-of-medgar-evers/>
- <https://www.thenmusa.org/biographies/medgar-w-evers/>
- <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2021/07/medgar-evers-a-hero-in-life-and-death/>
- <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/medgar-evers-us-army-veteran-and-civil-rights-leader>
- Gavin Scott; Clarion-Ledger, April 16, 1964
- Edward P. Moore, Jr; Memphis Commercial Appeal, June 23, 1964
- Jerry Mitchell; Clarion-Ledger, February 25, 1995
- Harold H. Martin; Saturday Evening Post (PA), March 14, 1964
- All the Way: The Fighting Journal of the Nationalist Movement, June 1994
- R.W. Scott, *Glory in Conflict: A Saga of Byron de la Beckwith*
- Reed Massengill, *Portrait of a Racist: The Man Who Killed Medgar Evers?*

Materials:

- Lecture Google Slides
- Posterboard
- Printer
- Markers/Colored Pencils/Crayons
- Glue
- Tape

Activity Procedures:

- Anticipatory Set (Bellringer): The teacher will ask students: Where do you get information from, and how does it impact you?
- The teacher will introduce the lesson and its objectives to students, explaining what an information diet is and how it impacts everyday life.
- The teacher will use the introduction narrative and Google Slides to guide a brief lecture on Medgar Evers, Byron de la Beckwith, and the power of information.
- The teacher will explain the information journal to the students and inform them how to use it daily.
- The teacher will explain that there are journal prompts for the next three days that students must answer.
- The teacher will explain that students will use information from the lecture/Google Slides and additional information from the above sources and from their information journal and journal prompts to create a public service announcement on the importance of vetting and analyzing the information they receive. The poster will be created on the fifth day of the unit.
- The teacher will distribute the rubric and address the five assessed categories on the final day.

Public Service Announcement Poster

- Students will use paper, scissors, markers, crayons, and/or colored pencils to create their physical timelines. A blank white paper can be used, or the timeline printout.

Adaptions

- Students can work independently or placed in groups of 2-3 to complete the project.
- The teacher can modify prompts and reduce journal requirements for struggling learners.
- The teacher can modify the information journal and journal prompts to fit in one day, decreasing the time needed for the unit to two days instead of five.

Continued Learning/Reading:

- <https://mississippencyclopedia.org/entries/medgar-wiley-evers/>
- <https://www.biography.com/crime/byron-de-la-beckwith>
- Myrlie Evers-Williams and Manning Marable, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero's Life and Legacy Revealed Through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches* (2005)
- Michael Vinson Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (2011)

- Reed Massengill, *Portrait of a Racist: The Man Who Killed Medgar Evers?* (1994)

Rubric:

Category	5 - Distinguished	4 - Proficient	3 - Apprentice	2 - Novice
Purpose	The purpose of the poster is clearly articulated.	The purpose of the poster is mostly clear.	The purpose of the poster is somewhat clear.	The purpose of the poster is completely unclear.
Imagery	All illustrations, photographs, and drawings add to the purpose of the poster.	Most of the visuals add to the purpose of the poster.	Some of the visuals add to the poster and some do not.	The visuals do not add to assist the purpose of the poster.
Mechanics	There are no errors in writing mechanics on the poster.	There are 1-4 grammatical or mechanical errors.	There are 5-7 grammatical or mechanical errors.	There are more than 7 grammatical or mechanical errors.
Layout and Design	The poster is neat and presentable.	The poster is mostly neat and presentable.	The poster is somewhat organized and presentable.	The poster is not neat or organized.
Creativity	The poster is original and creative.	The poster is mostly original and creative.	The poster is somewhat original and creative.	The poster is not original and lacks creativity.